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Pattern of conferences

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Patrick **Chuasoto** (Philippines)

I. Introduction

1. At its 2nd plenary meeting, on 19 September 2008, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its sixty-third session the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.

2. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 14th and 28th meetings, on 31 October and 23 December 2008. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the item are reflected in the relevant summary records (A/C.5/63/SR.14 and 28).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Conferences;[1]

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/63/119 and Corr.1);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2009 (A/63/119/Add.1);

(d) Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the existing special arrangements governing the recruitment of temporary assistance staff in the language services (A/63/94);

(e) Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/63/509).

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-third Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/63/32).

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II. Consideration of draft resolution A/C.5/63/L.15

4. At its 28th meeting, on 23 December, the Committee had before it a draft resolution entitled "Pattern of conferences" (A/C.5/63/L.15), submitted by the Chairman on the basis of informal consultations coordinated by the representative of Argentina.

5. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/63/L.15 without a vote (see para. 6).

III. Recommendation of the Fifth Committee

6. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Pattern of conferences

The General Assembly,

Recalling its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 40/243 of 18 December 1985, 41/213 of 19 December 1986, 43/222 A to E of 21 December 1988, 51/211 A to E of 18 December 1996, 52/214 of 22 December 1997, 53/208 A to E of 18 December 1998, 54/248 of 23 December 1999, 55/222 of 23 December 2000, 56/242 of 24 December 2001, 56/254 D of 27 March 2002, 56/262 of 15 February 2002, 56/287 of 27 June 2002, 57/283 A of 20 December 2002, 57/283 B of 15 April 2003, 58/250 of 23 December 2003, 59/265 of 23 December 2004, 60/236 A of 23 December 2005, 60/236 B of 8 May 2006, 61/236 of 22 December 2006 and 62/225 of 22 December 2007,

Reaffirming its resolution 42/207 C of 11 December 1987, in which it requested the Secretary-General to ensure the equal treatment of the official languages of the United Nations,

Having considered the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2008,[1] the relevant reports of the Secretary-General[2] and the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the audit of the existing special arrangements governing the recruitment of temporary assistance staff in the language services across the four main duty stations,[3]

Having also considered the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions,[4]

Reaffirming the pertinent provisions relating to conference services in its resolutions on multilingualism, in particular in resolution 61/266 of 16 May 2007,

I

Calendar of conferences and meetings

1. *Welcomes* the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2008;[1]

2. *Approves* the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2009, as submitted by the Committee on Conferences,[5] taking into account the observations of the Committee and subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

3. *Authorizes* the Committee on Conferences to make any adjustments to the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2009 that may become necessary as a

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[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-third Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/63/32).

[2] A/63/119 and Corr.1, and Add.1.

[3] A/63/94.

[4] A/63/509.

[5] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-third Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/63/32), annex II.

result of actions and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its sixty-third session;

4. *Notes with satisfaction* that the Secretariat has taken into account the arrangements referred to in General Assembly resolutions 53/208 A, 54/248, 55/222, 56/242, 57/283 B, 58/250, 59/265, 60/236 A, 61/236 and 62/225 concerning Orthodox Good Friday and the official holidays of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, and requests all intergovernmental bodies to observe those decisions when planning their meetings;

5. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that any modification to the calendar of conferences and meetings is implemented strictly in accordance with the mandate of the Committee on Conferences and other relevant resolutions of the General Assembly;

6. *Notes* that accurate, timely and consistent information provided to the Fifth Committee during its informal consultations facilitates the decision-making process in the Committee;

II

A. Utilization of conference-servicing resources

1. *Reaffirms* the practice that, in the use of conference rooms, priority must be given to the meetings of Member States;

2. *Notes* that the overall utilization factor at the four main duty stations remained at 83 per cent in 2007, the same as in 2006, which is above the established benchmark of 80 per cent;

3. *Welcomes* the steps taken by those bodies that have adjusted their programmes of work in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources, and requests the Committee on Conferences to continue consultations with the secretariats and bureaux of bodies that underutilize their conference-servicing resources;

4. *Recognizes* that late starts and unplanned early endings seriously affect the bodies' utilization factor owing to the amount of time lost, and invites the secretariats and bureaux of bodies to pay adequate attention to avoiding late starts and unplanned early endings;

5. *Notes* that the percentage of meetings held by the bodies entitled to meet "as required" that were provided with interpretation services in New York in 2007 as 88 per cent, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to report on the provision of conference services to these bodies through the Committee on Conferences;

6. *Recognizes* the importance of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States for the smooth functioning of the sessions of intergovernmental bodies, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure that, as far as possible, all requests for conference services for the meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States are met;

7. *Acknowledges with appreciation* the improvement in the percentage of meetings held by regional and other major groupings of Member States that were provided with interpretation services at the four main duty stations, which increased

to 84 per cent in 2007 from 76 per cent in 2006, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to employ innovative means to address the difficulties experienced by Member States owing to the lack of conference services for some meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States and to report thereon to the General Assembly through the Committee on Conferences;

8. *Once again urges* intergovernmental bodies to spare no effort at the planning stage to take into account the meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, to make provision for such meetings in their programmes of work and to notify conference services, well in advance, of any cancellations so that unutilized conference-servicing resources may, to the extent possible, be reassigned to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States;

9. *Notes with satisfaction* that, in accordance with several General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 61/236, section II.A, paragraph 9, in conformity with the headquarters rule, all meetings of Nairobi-based United Nations bodies were held in Nairobi in 2007, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-fourth session through the Committee on Conferences;

10. *Notes with appreciation* ongoing promotional efforts and initiatives undertaken by the management of the United Nations conference centre of the Economic Commission for Africa, which led to a continued upward trend in utilization of the premises in 2007;

11. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to explore means to increase the utilization of the United Nations conference centre of the Economic Commission for Africa, bearing in mind the headquarters minimum operating security standards, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session;

12. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General and Member States to adhere to the guidelines and procedures contained in the administrative instruction for the authorization of the use of United Nations premises for meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits;[6]

13. *Emphasizes* that such meetings, conferences, special events and exhibits must be consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations;

14. *Regrets* the voting incident in the seventh meeting of the Fourth Committee, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure prompt and effective communication between the Secretariat and members of its General Committee;

15. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report on the measures taken to avoid the recurrence of the above-mentioned situation in his next annual report on the pattern of conferences;

B. Impact of the capital master plan, strategy IV (phased approach) on meetings held at Headquarters during its implementation

1. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that implementation of the capital master plan, including the temporary relocation of conference-servicing staff to a swing space, will not compromise the quality of conference services provided to

[6] ST/AI/416.

Member States in the six official languages and the equal treatment of the language services, which should be provided with equally favourable working conditions and resources, with a view to receiving the maximum quality of services;

2. *Requests* all meeting requesters and organizers to liaise closely with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management of the Secretariat on all matters related to the scheduling of meetings to allow maximum predictability in coordinating activities at Headquarters during the construction period;

3. *Requests* the Committee on Conferences to keep the matter under constant review, and requests the Secretary-General to report regularly to the Committee on matters pertaining to the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations during the construction period;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to provide adequate information technology support for conference services, within the existing resources of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, in order to ensure their seamless operation throughout the implementation of the capital master plan;

5. *Notes* that during the implementation of the capital master plan, a part of the conference-servicing staff and information technology resources of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management will be temporarily relocated to a swing space, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to provide adequate support, within the existing resources of the Department, to ensure continued maintenance of the information technology facilities of the Department, implementation of the global information technology initiative and delivery of quality conference services;

6. *Requests* the Secretary-General to consult Member States on initiatives that affect the utilization of conference services and conference facilities;

III
Integrated global management

1. *Notes with appreciation* the progress achieved in the implementation of the global information technology project, aimed at integrating, across duty stations, information technology into meetings management and documentation-processing systems, and the global approach to harmonizing standards and information technology and sharing good practices and technological achievements among conference services at the four main duty stations;

2. *Also notes with appreciation* the initiatives undertaken in the context of integrated global management aimed at streamlining procedures, achieving economies of scale and improving the quality of conference services, and in this regard stresses the importance of ensuring equal treatment of conference-servicing staff as well as the principle of equal grade for equal work at the four main duty stations;

3. *Emphasizes* that the major goals of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management are to provide high-quality documents in a timely manner in all official languages in accordance with established regulations, as well as high-quality conference services to Member States at all duty stations, and to

achieve those aims as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to include in his next report on the pattern of conferences information about the financial savings achieved through implementation of the integrated global management projects;

5. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that all language services are given equal treatment and are provided with equally favourable working conditions and resources, with a view to achieving maximum quality of those services, with full respect for the specificities of the six official languages and taking into account their respective workloads;

6. *Reiterates* the need for the Secretary-General to ensure the compatibility of technologies used in all duty stations and to ensure that they are user-friendly in all official languages;

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General to complete the task of uploading all important older United Nations documents onto the United Nations website in all six official languages on a priority basis, so that these archives are also available to Member States through that medium;

8. *Reiterates* that the satisfaction of Member States is a key performance indicator in conference management and conference services;

9. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to ensure that measures taken by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to seek the evaluation by Member States of the quality of the conference services provided to them, as a key performance indicator of the Department, provide equal opportunities to Member States to present their evaluations in the six official languages of the United Nations and are in full compliance with relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly, through the Committee on Conferences, on progress made in this regard;

10. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to continue to explore best practices and techniques in client satisfaction evaluations and to report on a regular basis to the General Assembly on the results achieved;

11. *Welcomes* the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to seek the evaluation by Member States of the quality of the conference services provided to them, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to explore innovative ways to systematically capture and analyse feedback from Member States and committee chairpersons and secretaries on the quality of conference services and to report thereon to the General Assembly through the Committee on Conferences;

12. *Requests* the Secretary-General to keep the General Assembly apprised of progress made in integrated global management;

13. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the administrative policies, practices and procedures of conference services developed on the basis of recommendations of the task forces are in full compliance with relevant General Assembly resolutions;

IV
Documentation and publication-related matters

1. *Emphasizes* the paramount importance of the equality of the six official languages of the United Nations;

2. *Reaffirms* that the Fifth Committee is the appropriate Main Committee of the General Assembly entrusted with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters;

3. *Stresses* that matters related to conference management, including documentation, fall within the purview of the Fifth Committee;

4. *Reiterates with concern its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure that the rules concerning the simultaneous distribution of documents in all six official languages are strictly respected as regards both the distribution of printed copies and the posting of parliamentary documentation on the Official Document System and the United Nations website, in keeping with section III, paragraph 5, of its resolution 55/222;

5. *Reaffirms* its decision in section III, paragraph 9, of its resolution 59/265 that the issuance of documents in all six official languages on planning, budgetary and administrative matters requiring urgent consideration by the General Assembly shall be accorded priority;

6. *Requests* the Secretary-General to improve the documents planning process to ensure that the Fifth Committee receives, in the six official languages, all documents necessary for its consideration of a particular item, including reports of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, within the established time limits;

7. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to direct all departments of the Secretariat to include the following elements in their reports:

(a) Summary of the report;

(b) Consolidated conclusions, recommendations and other proposed actions;

(c) Relevant background information;

8. *Reiterates its request* that all documents submitted to legislative organs by the Secretariat and intergovernmental and expert bodies for consideration and action have conclusions and recommendations in bold print;

9. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to take steps to improve the quality and accuracy of meeting records in all six official languages through full reliance in the preparation and translation of those records on sound recordings and written texts of statements as they were delivered in the original languages;

10. *Expresses its deep concern* at the unprecedented high level of late submission of documentation by author departments, which, in turn, has a negative impact on the functioning of intergovernmental bodies, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session, through the Committee on Conferences, on urgent measures taken to improve overall timely submission, in particular by those submitting entities with submission compliance below 90 per cent for three years in a row;

11. *Notes with concern* the unprecedented delays in the issuance of documents in 2008, which heavily impacted the work of the General Assembly, and requests the Secretary-General to elaborate more effective accountability measures to ensure that both authors and their senior managers provide for the timely issuance of documents in all six official languages and to report to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session through the Committee on Conferences;

12. *Requests* the Secretary-General to enhance his efforts to address the problem cited in paragraph 10 above, particularly concerning documentation considered at the second resumed session of the Fifth Committee during the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, including convening the task force formed to study this matter, to provide an interim report on documentation concerning peacekeeping financing, to report on the results of these consultations and actions taken to solve this problem to the General Assembly, through the Committee on Conferences at its organizational session in 2009, in order for the Fifth Committee to consider the report at its second resumed session, and to provide a comprehensive report to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session through the Committee on Conferences;

13. *Recognizes* the increase of the workload of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the growing volume of reports and other documents before it, decides to authorize the Advisory Committee to meet for two additional weeks in 2009, on an exceptional basis, invites the Advisory Committee to continue considering how to better address its workload, and decides to discuss the number of weeks in a session of the Advisory Committee in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011;

14. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report on the associated expenditures in the second performance report on the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009;

15. *Stresses* the importance of the concordance principle in order to ensure equally valid texts of resolutions in all six official languages;

16. *Recalls*, section C, paragraph 12, of its resolution 54/248 and section III, paragraph 13, of its resolution 55/222, and reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to publish, prior to its sixty-fourth session, the updated version of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations[7] in the six official languages of the Organization;

V

Translation and interpretation-related matters

1. *Recalls* rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to redouble his efforts to ensure the highest quality of interpretation and translation services in all six official languages;

3. *Reiterates its request* that the Secretary-General make sure that the terminology used in the translation and interpretation services reflects the latest linguistic norms and terminology of the official languages in order to ensure the highest quality;

4. *Takes note* of the recommendations provided by the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the Secretariat in its report,[3] and requests the Secretary-

[7] ST/SGB/2003/7.

General to ensure their full implementation and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session through the Committee on Conferences;

5. *Reaffirms* section IV, paragraph 3, of its resolution 59/265, section IV, paragraph 4, of its resolution 60/236 B and section V, paragraph 3, of its resolution 61/236, and reiterates its request that the Secretary-General, when recruiting temporary assistance in the language services, ensure that all language services are given equal treatment and are provided with equally favourable working conditions and resources, with a view to achieving maximum quality of their services, with full respect for the specificities of each of the six official languages and taking into account their respective workloads;

6. *Expresses continued concern* at the high vacancy rate in the interpretation and translation services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, and requests the Secretary-General to address this as a matter of priority through, inter alia, assistance from Member States in advertising and facilitating the conduct of competitive examinations to fill these language vacancies;

7. *Notes with appreciation* the measures taken by the Secretariat to fill current and future vacancies at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the information contained in paragraph 107 of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences,[8] and requests the Secretary-General to consider further measures aimed at decreasing the vacancy rates in Nairobi and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session;

8. *Also notes with appreciation* the initiative to seek a long-term solution to the high vacancy rates in language services in the United Nations Office at Nairobi by engaging the services of a consultant to explore the possibilities of providing enhanced training programmes to potential professional translators and interpreters on the African continent, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session on efforts in this regard;

9. *Requests* the Secretary-General to examine all aspects concerning recruitment and retention of language staff at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, to make recommendations in this regard and to report to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session through the Committee on Conferences;

10. *Recognizes* the acute problems faced by the United Nations Office at Geneva in providing conference services as required, as described by the Secretary-General in paragraph 103 of his report on the pattern of conferences,[8] and in this connection requests the Secretary-General to address these problems and to make all efforts to meet requirements in the context of the latest surge of meetings;

11. *Requests* the Secretary-General to seek a more effective strategy to fill current and future language post vacancies at all duty stations in a timely manner, takes note of paragraph 92 of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences,[8] and also requests the Secretary-General to hold the competitive examinations for the recruitment of language staff referred to in that paragraph, as well as other examinations beyond 2009, well in advance so as to fill current and future language post vacancies at all duty stations in a timely manner, and to inform the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session of efforts in this regard;

[8] A/63/119 and Corr.1.

12. *Welcomes* the steps taken by the Secretary-General to address more effectively the demographic situation and the issue of succession planning, in particular by resorting to temporary assistance in dealing with acute needs, as well as enhancing internal and external training programmes, developing staff exchange programmes among organizations and participating in outreach to institutions that train language staff for international organizations, and requests him to continue to take such measures;

13. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue exploring the possibility of introducing a traineeship programme in order to attract and train young professionals for a career in the language services of the United Nations;

14. *Notes with concern* the challenges presented by the demographic situation in the language services, as described in paragraphs 91 to 95 of the report of the Secretary-General;[8]

15. *Notes* that the intention of the General Assembly, in adopting section VI, paragraph 1, of its resolution 57/305 of 15 April 2003, was to increase the availability of retired language staff for employment with the language services, and requests the Secretary-General to clarify and in turn implement the provisions of that paragraph concerning the ceiling on United Nations earnings of United Nations language staff retirees;

16. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to seek evaluation by Member States of the quality of the conference services provided to them, including through the language-specific informational meetings held twice a year, and to ensure that such measures provide equal opportunities to Member States to present their evaluations in the six official languages of the United Nations and are in full compliance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly;

17. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to continue to improve the accuracy of translation of documents into the six official languages, giving particular significance to the quality of translation;

18. *Further requests* the Secretary-General to take the steps necessary to enhance translation quality in all six official languages, in particular for contractual translation, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session;

19. *Requests* the Secretary-General to provide, at all duty stations, adequate staff at the appropriate level, with a view to ensuring appropriate quality control for external translation, with due consideration of the principle of equal grade for equal work;

20. *Takes note* of the information on the impact of freelance recruitment on the quality of interpretation at all duty stations contained in paragraphs 101 to 105 of the report of the Secretary-General,[8] and requests the Secretary-General to report on the issue to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session through the Committee on Conferences;

21. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session on the experience, lessons learned and best practices of the main duty stations in performing quality control of contractual translations, including on requirements relating to the number and appropriate level of the staff needed to carry out this function.